

CHAPTER I

THE MYTH OF OSIRIS

IN ancient Egypt the god whose death and resurrection were Osiris the annually celebrated with alternate sorrow and joy was $\hat{f}_n p_t \hat{^n}$ Osiris, the most popular of all Egyptian deities ; and there part of are good grounds for classing him in one of his aspects with and Attis, Adonis and Attis as a personification of the great yearly vicissitudes of nature, especially of the corn. But the immense vogue which he enjoyed for many ages induced his devoted worshippers to heap upon him the attributes and powers of many other gods ; so that It is not always easy to strip him, so to say, of his borrowed plumes and to restore them to their proper owners. In the following pages I do not pretend to enumerate and analyse all the alien elements which thus gathered round the popular deity. All that I shall attempt to do is to peel off these accretions and to exhibit the god, as far as possible, in his primitive simplicity. The discoveries of recent years in Egypt enable us to do so with more confidence now than when I first addressed myself to the problem many years ago.

The story of Osiris is told in a connected form only The myth by Plutarch, whose narrative has been confirmed and ^{of Osiris} to some extent amplified in modern times by the evidence of the monuments.¹ Of the monuments which illustrate

¹ See PhiUirch, *iv* et *Osiris* ('Berlin, 1909), pp. 38 sqq. ; A. 12-20; R. V. Lur/one, *Dhionaria di Wiedemann, Die Religion Jer alien Mitohgia E^izia* (Turin, 1881-1884), *Agypter* (Munsicr i. W. 1890), pp. vol. ii. pp. 692 M//. ; A. Erman, 109 .tyy. ; /</. , *Religion of the Ancient Aegyptcn nnd ac\$>f>tisehes Lebcn im Egyptians* (London, 1897), pp. 207 *Altertittn* (Tubingen, N.D.), pp. 365- sqq. | G. Maspero, *Jlisfoire ancunne* 369; /(/,, *Die iigyptiscke Religion" des Pcup/cs de FOrient Classiqite* ^ i. 172